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PART ONE

POLITICS IN BRITAIN

JUNE 9th, 1983: A REMARKABLE GENERAL ELECTION

The final result of the June 1983 General Election is shown in Table 1. Although the Conservatives enjoyed a landslide victory in terms of the number of seats they won in Parliament, it was not a victory based on a surge of popular support. In fact a slightly greater proportion of voters (43.9%) supported the Conservatives in the 1979 General Election than in 1983 (43.5%). Mrs. Thatcher's success was based largely on the fragmentation of the opposition vote.

	Total vote	% of all votes	% of all electorate	Total no. of seats
Conservative	12,991,377	43.5	31.6	397
Labour	8,437,120	28.3	20.6	209
Alliance	7,775,048	26.0	18.9	23*
SNP	331,975			2
Plaid Cymru	125,309			2
Others				17

* Liberals 17 seats, SDP 6 seats. Turnout 72.7%

Table 1. The 1983 General Election Result

The 1982 edition of *Politics PAL* described a troubled and divided Tory Party which looked like it was heading for an inevitable defeat at the next general election. But later that year the Falklands War was to provide the turning point for Conservative fortunes. Before the Falklands War few journalists believed Mrs. Thatcher's tough speeches and most of them were predicting 'U-turns' in government policies. But after the Falklands victory, the main view of Mrs. Thatcher found in the newspapers was that she really was a tough leader who was prepared to see her policies carried out no matter how high the risks involved and how great the opposition.

During the 1960s and 1970s governments usually managed the economy so that conditions improved as a general election got nearer. In 1983, however, the government was re-elected with over 3 million people unemployed. The Labour Party was unable to convince voters that its policies would cure Britain's economic problems. Labour's performance before and during the campaign was so poor that its share of the vote (28.3%) was lower than at any general election since 1918. The Alliance did considerably better than the Liberal performance in any postwar general election. But not all those voters who deserted Labour after 1979 went over to the Alliance - two-fifths of Labour's lost voters either abstained in 1983 or voted Tory.

The electoral statistics in Table 1 show a massive distortion between the share-out of votes and the share-out of seats in the House of Commons. Although the Alliance "broke the mould" in terms of the votes it won, it failed to make much impression in terms of the seats it won. Support for the Alliance was evenly distributed throughout the country and it has been calculated that if the Tories and Labour Party had lost another 10% or so of their vote to the Alliance, the overall result would have been much the same. Table 2 also shows how the first-past-the-post system has helped to reduce the impact of changes in voting behaviour on the composition of the House of Commons.

	% of seats in Commons held by Labour and Conservative	% of total vote won by Labour and Conservative	% of total electorate voting for Labour and Conservative
1951	98.5	96.8	79.9
1955	98.8	96.1	73.8
1959	98.9	93.2	73.4
1964	98.6	87.5	67.4
1966	97.9	89.9	68.1
1970	98.0	89.5	64.4
1974 (Feb)	94.2	75.1	59.2
1974 (Nov)	93.8	75.0	54.7
1979	95.8	80.8	61.4
1983	93.2	71.8	52.2

Table 2. The Decline of Two-Party Domination in Voting

The 1983 General Election marked the final collapse of social class membership as an indicator of which party individuals are likely to support. Only 47% of the electorate voted in a way that might be predicted from knowing which social class they came from. In other words, tossing a coin would be as reliable a guide to predicting a person's vote as knowing his or her social class.

Suggested Reading:

Ivor Crewe, 'The disturbing truth behind Labour's rout', *The Guardian* (13.6.83)

Peter Kellner, 'Anatomy of a landslide', *New Statesman* (17.6.83)

Zig Layton-Henry, 'The Conservatives and the General Election of 1983'; Steve Bristow, 'Labour and the General Election of 1983'; Martin Harrop, 'The Alliance and the General Election of 1983' in L. Robins (Ed.): *Updating British Politics* (London: The Politics Association, 1984). See last page for details.

THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY: HOME AND DRY

The 1983 General Election took place during the most serious economic recession since the Second World War. Yet at no time during the campaign did the Conservatives look in any danger from threats posed by the other parties. The Conservative campaign was almost presidential in style focussing on Mrs. Thatcher, her personality and her achievements. Comparisons of the party's performance in the general elections of 1979 and 1983 are complicated by the boundary changes which took place in 1982. It is clear, however, that the Tories continued to do well in England (particularly the South) winning nearly 70% of all English seats. The Conservative Party continued to do badly in Scotland, although in Wales Tory support held up. Since 1979 Labour's share of the Welsh vote slipped from 48.6% to 37.5% whilst the Tory share fell less than 2% from 32.7% in 1979 to 31.0% in 1983.

	A/B Professional Managerial	C1 Clerical and office workers	C2 Skilled Manual	D Semi-skilled & Unskilled Manual
	%	%	%	%
Conservative	62	55	39	29
Labour	12	21	35	44
Alliance	27	24	27	28

Table 3. Voting by Class in the 1983 General Election

The Gallup data contained in Table 3 shows clearly the decline in class-based voting referred to on page 7. The Conservatives remained the most popular party amongst professional and managerial classes, but for the first time they also became the most popular choice amongst skilled manual workers. Only amongst semi and unskilled workers did the Conservatives fail to be the most popular party.

After the election a Cabinet reshuffle further weakened the position of the 'wets' inside the Conservative Party. Francis Pym was sacked from the Foreign Office and David Howell from Transport. The new Cabinet included Nigel Lawson as Chancellor, Sir Geoffrey Howe as Foreign Secretary, Leon Brittan as Home Secretary and Cecil Parkinson as head of the newly-merged Department of Trade and Industry. William Whitelaw, the Deputy Leader, became a viscount and Leader of the House of Lords. This was the first hereditary peerage created since 1964. After Cecil Parkinson resigned, Norman Tebbit took over at Trade and Industry and Tom King replaced him as Secretary of State for Employment.

Just at the very time when the Conservatives should have been celebrating their massive victory at the polls a number of things began to go wrong for the party and cause considerable embarrassment.

* A report published in October 1983 claimed that extreme right-wing and racist individuals, particularly members of the National Front and British Movement, were infiltrating the party at constituency level. The report criticised a number of Tory MPs for having links with extreme right-wing groups such as WISE (Welsh, Irish, Scottish, English) and the London Swinton Circle. It also criticised the Monday Club, a group of right-wing Tory MPs, for the racist attitudes expressed at its meetings.

* A number of party activists have become very disillusioned with the way in which Conservative Party conferences are organised and run. The Charter Movement held its first meeting on the fringe of the 1983 conference. Members of the Charter Movement would like to see the conference become more democratic - in particular, they want the Party Chairman to be elected and not appointed as at present. It is also felt that too many Ministers speak at conference and not enough activists from the constituencies. The final criticism was that conference debates are too 'stage-managed' with only self-congratulatory motions being selected for discussion. For example, many Tories are very worried by the issue of unemployment yet it was hardly discussed by the 1983 conference.

* The 'Parkinson affair' involved a scandal in the private life of a leading Tory Minister who was known to be highly thought of by Mrs. Thatcher. In political terms the incident was not as serious as the Profumo affair of 1963 which involved a possible security risk and did much damage to the Conservative government. The Parkinson affair was

more on a level with the Lambton/Jellicoe scandal of 1973 which did little damage to the image of the Conservative government led by Edward Heath. But the Parkinson affair did dent Mrs. Thatcher's reputation for 'sound judgment'. At first she accepted advice that Cecil Parkinson need not resign and she supported him, but as events unfolded and his resignation looked inevitable so Mrs. Thatcher's action looked ill-judged and inept.

* The increasingly off-hand treatment of Britain by the United States was seen during the US invasion of Grenada, which is a member of the Commonwealth. Mrs. Thatcher had always given the impression that she and President Reagan saw eye to eye on all important issues, yet the Grenada invasion proved that he would totally ignore Britain when important decisions had to be made. His policy caused considerable disagreement inside the Tory Party - some MPs condemned the US invasion whilst others attacked the Cabinet for not offering immediate support and backing for the American President.

* Despite the fact that unemployment has fallen a little and productivity is rising, there is much 'bad news' coming out of various ministries on the effects of public spending cuts on issues such as energy prices and the future of the NHS. The 'wets' inside the party who were disorganised before the election are now vocal in their opposition to Mrs. Thatcher's policies. Public alarm over cuts in the welfare state sharpened the 'wet' attack. Sir Ian Gilmour, for example, argued that

> "A government that won't pay to put people to work soon finds that it has serious difficulties paying for them to go to hospital or school or even to be defended from enemies abroad and criminals at home. If we are not careful, it won't even be anarchy plus the constable - we shan't be able to afford the constable."

Mrs. Thatcher faces the danger of a coordinated attack on government policies from not only the 'wets' but also the centre of the party. Her large majority in the Commons means that many Tory backbench MPs now feel that they can rebel against the government without any danger of overthrowing it. Already there is comment in pro-Conservative newspapers about "a tired Tory cabinet" and "metal fatigue in Iron Lady". Further attacks from inside the party will confirm the image of a weak and divided government.

As the new government became increasingly accident prone, so pressure grew to "improve the presentation" of government policies. Lord Whitelaw took over the coordination of public information policy and was nicknamed "the Minister of the Banana Skins". It was felt that some Ministers were making mistakes which could have easily been avoided. For example the handling of the NHS staff cuts was bungled by Norman Fowler, Michael Heseltine's reaction to showing *The Day After* on television was worrying, and the Chancellor's treatment of Peter Walker on energy prices lacked all sensitivity. Lord Whitelaw's job is to anticipate such

problems and ensure that efficient communication avoids situations which would embarrass the government. But some critics argue that the government's problem is not one of *presentation* ("our policies are the right ones but we are not getting them across to the public") but one of *substance* ("it is our policies which are wrong").

Suggested Reading:

Keith Middlemas, 'The crisis of the Tory Party', *New Society* (6.10.83)

'Thatcherism without thrust', *The Economist* (8.10.83)

Martin Burch, 'Mrs. Thatcher's approach to leadership in government: 1979-June 1983', *Parliamentary Affairs* (Autumn 1983)

THE LABOUR PARTY: THE ONLY WAY IS UP

Labour's share of the electorate in 1983 was half that of 1951, with Labour managing to poll a mere 2.3% more votes than the recently formed Alliance. Outside of London there are now only 3 Labour MPs in southern England, and there has been a massive decline in support in the old Labour strongholds of the Midlands and Wales. Labour has become the party of the urban and industrial North.

Labour's election campaign was unprofessional. Only 9 days before polling day was the campaign placed in the hands of a small organising committee. Up to then the direction of the campaign had been guided by an 'open forum' of up to 40 people. Labour was unable to move the economic debate away from inflation (where the Tories were doing well) to unemployment (where the Tories were doing badly). On defence there was open disagreement between party leaders on what Labour's policy was.

The annual conference at Brighton voted in the Kinnock-Hattersley 'dream ticket' for the leadership. Roy Hattersley did poorly in the leadership contest but easily won the deputy leadership election.

Leadership contest:		Deputy Leadership contest:	
Kinnock	71.3%	Hattersley	67.3%
Hattersley	19.3%	Meacher	27.9%
Heffer	6.3%	Davies	3.5%
Shore	3.1%	Dunwoody	1.3%

Table 4. Labour's Leadership Elections

The problems faced by the new leadership team are formidable, but it must be of some comfort to them that in 1983 the party hit rockbottom and its fortunes can only improve. These problems include

* Labour's diminishing electoral base. Ivor Crewe has pointed out that political divisions no longer exist between classes so much as within the working class. He drew some useful distinctions between the features of the 'old' working class and the 'new' working class. He stated that Labour no longer appeals to the working class as a whole, but only to the 'old' working class which is now too small to give Labour victory in a general election. Table 5 shows Labour's dilemma as it revealed itself in 1983.

	New Working Class			Old Working Class		
	Owner occupier	Works in private sector	Lives in South	Council tenant	Works in public sector	Lives in Scotland or North
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Con.	47	36	42	19	29	32
Lab.	25	37	26	57	46	42
Alliance	28	27	32	24	25	26

Table 5. The 'New' and 'Old' Working Classes

Faced with the knowledge that the Tories are attractive to the new working class and that the SDP is attractive to many middle class socialists, Neil Kinnock is determined to change Labour's image. He realises that if Labour is to win the next election it will need a massive 12% swing in order to win an additional 117 seats. To do this Labour will need to win back the support of better off groups in society. He has stated that

> "For the harsh electoral reality dictates that if we are to be of real use to the deprived and insecure we must have the support of those in more secure social circumstances - the home owner as well as the homeless, the stable family as well as the single parent, the confidently employed as well as the unemployed, the majority as well as the minorities."

Others on both the left and right of the party are more pessimistic about Labour's chances at the next general election. They are calling for Labour to form a 'popular front' or coalition of all anti-Tory parties in order to defeat Mrs. Thatcher. They are prepared to accept electoral reform as a price to pay for a popular front with the SDP/Liberal Alliance.

* Labour's links with the trade unions are still an electoral liability. There is considerable support for Conservative trade union reforms and public hostility to strikes and picketing 'spills over' to make Labour unpopular. The irony is that only 39% of trade union members voted Labour in 1983 - a decline from 50% in 1979.

* Labour faces a severe financial crisis. Almost 80% of the party's income comes from the trade unions. This income is under threat from the latest trade union Bill introduced by the Employment Minister Tom King but originally written by his predecessor, Norman Tebbit. It is proposed that each union will have to hold a secret ballot to see if its members want their union to contribute to Labour via a political fund. Opinion polls suggest that over half of trade unionists do not want their unions to affiliate to the Labour Party. Such a loss of income would be disastrous for Labour.

* Labour has not got a convincing alternative to Conservative monetarist policies which is attractive to the public. The left-wing 'alternative economic strategy' has not won wide support from the public.

Not all members of the Labour Party have learnt the same lessons in defeat. It is likely that the arguments rehearsed at the 1983 conference will be repeated in one form or another during 1984. Basically, the arguments are that

(i) Labour has the right policies but failed to put them across and persuade the electorate. The view is that Labour should stick to its manifesto policies because they are the 'right' policies and not alter them just because they are unpopular with the electorate. Tony Benn argued that over 8 million voted for Labour *because* of its socialism and that there is no need for the party to get alarmed over the scale of its defeat. He argued that "The 1983 Labour manifesto commanded the loyalty of millions of voters and a democratic socialist bridgehead has been established from which further advances in public understanding and support can be made." Others have argued that Labour has been written off before. After three successive election defeats during the 1950s many people were talking about 'the end of the Labour Party', and yet Labour returned to form the government throughout most of the 1960s and 1970s. Just because Labour is hitting hard times once again does not mean the end of the party as a force in British politics.

(ii) Labour has the wrong policies and has to rethink them if it is to win the next election. Denis Healey has argued that on issue after issue - on defence, law and order, inflation, and home ownership - Labour was out of touch with the electorate. *The Economist* has reported that Neil Kinnock has already started to move Labour towards accepting more popular policies, "His rapid shuffle away from the party's left wing over recent months, as the office of leader beckoned, was reinforced this week as he found himself standing up to his left wing on issue after issue.

On EEC membership, on nuclear disarmament and on a range of domestic policies, Mr. Kinnock demanded (and largely obtained) freedom to manoeuvre and to postpone arguments over specific policy commitments." Since the elections to the NEC gave Neil Kinnock an 18-10 majority it is likely that he will get his way on most issues long after the 1983 annual conference. John Silkin wants Labour to think again about the party's constitution which he believes worries many voters. Writing in the *New Statesman*, he argued that Labour ought to modify the basis of the electoral college which gave the unions too much say (see *1982 Politics PAL)*. He proposed a one member/one vote system and also floated the idea that Labour might have two leaders - one to lead the mass party and the other to lead the PLP. The latter would become Prime Minister when Labour won a general election.

Suggested Reading:

Barry Hindess & Paul Hirst, 'Labour's crisis', *New Society* (29.9.83)

Ivor Crewe, 'A new leader is only one cherry on Labour's fruit machine', *The Guardian* (30.9.83)

Bernard Crick, 'The future of the Labour Party', *The Political Quarterly* (October-December 1983)

THE ALLIANCE: CHEWING ON A SOFT CENTRE

With 26% of the popular vote, the Alliance's share of the vote in Britain was higher than any achieved by the Liberals since 1923. The Alliance vote was spread fairly evenly across the country, across different social classes, across different generations of voters and across the sexes. But the present voting system punishes parties whose votes are evenly distributed and rewards those whose votes are concentrated geographically. For example Labour won only 700,000 more votes than the Alliance and lost deposits in 119 constituencies (the Alliance lost only 11 deposits) but Labour won 186 more seats. In 24 of the 47 seats gained by the Conservatives from Labour, the Tory share of the vote actually fell (whilst Labour's share fell even more). The election result reinforced the need for PR in the minds of Alliance supporters. For every 40,000 votes cast for it, Labour won an MP: for every 33,000 votes cast for it, the Conservative Party won a seat. The Alliance received 338,000 votes for every MP elected. The even spread of the Alliance vote also poses problems because this is a 'soft vote' that can disappear just as quickly as it appeared. The Labour Party must feel that it can retain its bedrock of 8 million votes come what may. But since Alliance support is hard to identify, there can be no such certainty about retaining it.

The Alliance took advantage of Labour's poor election campaign and was able to project a 'moderate and sensible' message to the

electorate. During the early weeks of the campaign support for the Alliance stuck around 18%, and publicity was switched from Roy Jenkins to David Steel. Within a short period telephone polls commissioned for the Alliance showed support had increased to 24%.

* The SDP feels that it cannot win any more votes from Labour and is now trying to win support from Tory voters. The new leader, Dr. David Owen, expressed strong support for the free market economy and moved the party to the political right at its conference. He also kept in line with public opinion by arguing for trade union reforms and defending the NHS.

  Although the Alliance has attracted support from all social classes, SDP activists are drawn from a very narrow section of society. A study made by Herbert Doring revealed them to be mainly middle aged and middle class. A staggering 85% of them had a higher education compared with 25% and 27% for Labour and Tory activists respectively.

* Some Liberals have criticised David Steel's leadership and attempts were made at the Liberal Assembly to limit his authority. But proposals to remove his control over the manifesto and to share his power with a deputy leader were rejected. These differences have led to a senior Liberal, Cyril Smith, ceasing to play a public role in the party's affairs.

The Alliance faces a problematic future. Grassroot Liberals - notably Tony Greaves - have pointed out that considerable differences still exist between Liberal policies and Alliance policies. Nevertheless they believe that an 'organic merger' should take place between local SDP and Liberal organisations as and when appropriate. Ultimately these local mergers could lead to a national merger between the Liberals and SDP. Others disagree with this course of action because they do not believe that there is enough common ground between the two parties for a permanent merger to take place. Michael Meadowcroft and Cyril Smith argue that the Alliance is simply a temporary coalition formed to promote PR. Once electoral reform has been achieved the Alliance will be disbanded and the two parties will compete against each other.

Suggested Reading:

Jo Grimond, 'What next for the Alliance?', *Spectator* (18.6.83)

Herbert Doring, 'Who are the Social Democrats?', *New Society* (8.9.83)

William Wallace, 'The crisis of the Alliance', *New Society* (22.9.83)

Donley T. Studlar, 'By-elections and the Liberal-SDP Alliance' in L. Robins (Ed.): *Updating British Politics* (London: The Politics Association, 1984)

MINORITY PARTIES: THE DECLINE OF THE FRINGE

* The SNP remains wedded to total independence for Scotland and is opposed to devolution. 'Moderates' who wanted the SNP to adopt a more gradual programme were defeated in the elections to party posts. They feel that the SNP has moved too far to the fringe of politics as a result of the influence wielded by the left-wing 79 Group. This explains in part why the SNP did so poorly in the general election. Moderates argue that if the SNP is to return to the centre of the political stage, it will have to become more like the Liberal Party in its general characteristics.

* Plaid Cymru have been discussing future strategy in terms of where to direct its resources. Some believe that Parliamentary and national politics remain the most important area for Plaid Cymru involvement. Others disagree and say that the party should use most of its resources in fighting local politics.

* The Ecology Party fielded more than 100 candidates in the general election but polled an average of only 1.0% of votes. The Ecology Party was in 1973 the first European ecology party to be founded but it has not enjoyed the success of the German 'Green' Party. The 'new' party that has monopolised media attention in Britain is the SDP, with the Ecology Party remaining ignored by the Press and television.

* The Communist Party has continued in its decline. Membership now stands at only 15,691. The party fielded 35 candidates in the general election but they only received 11,598 votes between them. The party has also suffered from bitter internal fighting between the Eurocommunists who have a softer approach to politics which is independent from Moscow, and the traditional, hard-line, pro-Soviet communists.

Suggested Reading:

Wolfgang Rudig, 'Ecology Party in the wings', *New Statesman* (5.8.83)

PUBLIC OPINION: TOP MARKS FOR THE POLLSTERS

More opinion polls were published during the summer of 1983 than in any previous election campaign. Table 6 shows that they were generally accurate in their final judgements, although they tended to overestimate the Conservative share of the vote and underestimate Labour's share. The final poll organised by MORI proved to be the most accurate.

Poll	Conservative	Labour	Alliance
Audience Selection	46	23	29
Harris	47	25	26
Gallup	45.5	26.5	26
Marplan	46	26	26
NOP	47	25	26
MORI	44	28	26
ELECTION RESULT	43	28	26

Table 6. Final Opinion Polls

The different types of impact that such opinion polls have on voting behaviour was discussed in the *1983 Politics PAL*. The effect of the polls on the behaviour of politicians was most interesting. During the campaign the Alliance used telephone polls which overestimated their support. Alliance leaders claimed that they had overtaken Labour and were eating into the Conservative vote. For the first time during the campaign (on May 31st) Mrs. Thatcher attacked the Alliance. Cecil Parkinson, Roy Hattersley and Denis Healey launched attacks on the use of telephone polls. In his study of the election Martin Harrop commented that "Indeed, from this point on, the campaign resembled a giant teach-in on polling methods more than a debate on Britain's future." Polls published in the months after the election showed that Labour was pulling back support from the Alliance. The table below has been designed for you to complete by entering data during 1984 - make a note of whether party support remains stable or becomes volatile.

POLL	CON %	LAB %	ALLI-ANCE %	OTHER %	COMMENT
Sunday Times MORI (18.12.83)	40.5	31.5	18.0	2.0	Lowest support for Tories since before Falklands - end of the 'Falklands factor'?

Table 7. Public Opinion 1983-84

BY-ELECTION RESULTS: POLITICAL DRAMA AHEAD?

Table 8 shows why by-election results must be interpreted with caution. The Conservatives did poorly in the by-elections held between 1981-83 yet came back to win the general election by a big margin. It can be seen that using by-elections as a measure of public opinion is misleading because voters are very volatile, and no more so than in by-elections.

	% of vote in by-elections	% of vote in general election
Conservative	27.5	43.5
Labour	34.7	28.3
Alliance	31.2	26.0

Table 8. By-Elections (1981-3) and 1983 General Election

By-election results tend to be 'overinterpreted' by politicians and the mass media. This is because by-elections are often dramatic and therefore newsworthy events. The first by-election shown in the table below almost provided the Government with its first electoral disaster. Again the table allows you to add results as and when by-elections take place. Compare the trends in Table 7 with that in Table 9 and assess which is likely to be the most accurate measure of public opinion.

Penrith & the Border July 28th 1983		% change since gen. election	
Conservative	17,530	-12.8	Caused by elevation of Whitelaw to Lords. Tories cling to seat.
Lib/SDP All.	16,978	+16.7	
Labour	2,834	-5.9	

Table 9. By-Election Results 1983-84

ELECTORAL REFORM: A CAMPAIGN IS LAUNCHED

The 'unproportional representation' in the link between votes cast and MPs sent to Parliament is shown in Tables 1 and 2. If the electorate had voted the same way on June 9th under a system of PR the Conservatives would have won approximately 285 seats, Labour 180 and the Alliance 160. In other words, the election result would have produced a hung Parliament. We can only guess whether a minority Tory government would have hung on to power before calling another election, or whether the Alliance would have made a pact with one of the other parties to form a coalition government. However this sort of speculation contains too many 'ifs' and 'buts'. We have to bear in mind that if Britain had used a system of true PR in 1983, many people would not have voted the way they did because there would have been less need for tactical voting.

The unfairness of the present 'winner takes all' system was condemned by Parliament in 1917, but there was no agreement on what should replace it. The Commons favoured a system based on STV whereas the Lords supported the Alternative Vote. Deadlock between the Upper and Lower Chambers resulted in the survival of the present system.

In 1983 an all-party campaign for electoral reform was launched, the Campaign for Fair Votes. The Campaign's first leaflet stated

> There is a better voting system available, which most other democracies use. It gives the voters more choice and better representation and it offers more stable and effective government. It is called PR or proportional representation. Opinion polls show that a majority of people, in all parties, would like to change to PR and have fair voting as their democratic right. ... That is why the Campaign is organising one of the biggest petitions ever seen, a massive Vote for Fair Representation. We hope millions of people will sign and show their MPs what they think. We are asking for a referendum on the issue of voting reform to stop MPs thwarting the public will any longer

You can see that the Campaign is deliberately vague about exactly what type of PR system it favours. Also the claim that PR would offer more stable government is hard to justify at the present time. It is *because* the present system distorts the vote that the 1980s will be marked by the continuity of Mrs. Thatcher's Conservative Government.

The Campaign's political leaders are Roy Jenkins, Sir Ian Gilmour and Austin Mitchell. It has also won the support of union officials in the AUEW and EETPU as well as the chairmen of Thorn-EMI, British Oxygen and Beechams.

The Government is at present considering electoral reforms, but not the sort of reforms favoured by the Campaign for Fair Votes. It has been proposed that the deposits for candidates in parliamentary elections should be increased, and that 'holiday' votes should be introduced for those who are away from home on election day.

Suggested Reading:

Peter Pulzer, 'The profound effects of proportional representation', *Financial Times* (12.10.83)

TELEVISING PARLIAMENT: WILL IT REPLACE VIDEO NASTIES?

From time to time there have been proposals that Parliament, including Select Committees, should be televised. The issue emerged again in 1983. In November Austin Mitchell won enough support (164 votes to 159) to introduce a Bill to televise the Commons. He argued that all the technical problems could be overcome. Small wall-mounted cameras could be used which would not involve camera crews. The lighting in the Commons would not have to be stronger than it is now. And finally, only the MP speaking would be filmed; there would be no shots of empty benches or sleeping backbenchers.

In December members of the House of Lords voted by 3 to 1 in favour of televising their debates. The Lords supported the idea more than the Commons because they get less coverage in newspapers and on TV news. If the Lords do get televised, this will increase pressure on MPs to agree to the televising of the Commons.

Why is there opposition to the introduction of cameras to film the day-to-day life of Parliament? Colin Seymour-Ure has suggested that exists because Parliament and television are rival institutions: "Put briefly, which is the 'bigger' - Parliament or television? ... Is Parliament bound to be changed by the development of television: or can it shape and limit the medium to its own ends?"

The broadcasting of edited parliamentary debates, together with occasional select committee hearings, has taken place on the radio since 1975. This move was hailed to be a radical move at the time but is now considered to have been a modest development. Recordings of parliamentary proceedings are contained in short programmes, *Today in Parliament* and *Yesterday in Parliament* which are broadcast late at night before being repeated early the following morning. A digest, *The Week in Westminster*, is broadcast on Saturday mornings. Important debates are broadcast 'live' during the afternoon and evening but these are relatively rare.

Occasionally sound recordings of Parliament are used in TV news programmes, usually accompanied by a still photograph of the politician whose voice is being heard.

Those who support the idea of televising Parliament argue that people now learn about politics mainly from television. In the past programmes on important issues, such as Britain's membership of the EEC, have been based on 'mock' debates in Parliament and have attracted large viewing audiences. They argue that the public should not have to watch imitations of Parliament when the real thing is available. Also the presence of television cameras in the Commons would ensure that members of the Government, including the Prime Minister, fully respected the status of the Chamber. There have been numerous occasions in the past when an important announcement has been made first on television and then in the Commons. Naturally this greatly annoys backbenchers. Ministers would not be tempted first to announce new measures on programmes such as *Panorama* if the Commons announcement was also televised.

Critics of televising Parliament argue that there is no demand for such programmes, as is shown by the small numbers who listen to the radio programmes. But more important, it is argued that television would mislead the public about the nature of Parliament. Frontbench 'super stars' would dominate programmes and backbenchers would find themselves having to explain to their constituents why they were never seen on the screen. Ministers would 'play to the cameras' and not address the House. Even in the budget speech which is broadcast live on radio the Chancellor is tempted to speak to the mass audience rather than to the House. Finally, opponents of televising Parliament fear that the presence of cameras would encourage outrageous behaviour by MPs in the knowledge that it would make 'good television'. Even without cameras there are occasional brawls and other undignified events. Television would trivialise Parliament by featuring telegenic MPs with interesting personalities at the expense of the unattractive MP and the analysis of issues. The presence of cameras would also encourage MPs themselves to trivialise proceedings, as in the case of an Australian MP who used a Parliamentary broadcast to pass a message on to his dentist.

Suggested Reading:

Charles Moore, 'Showing the reality', *Spectator* (12.12.83)

ECONOMIC POLICY: PUBLIC SPENDING CUTS AND PRIVATISATION

Previous editions of *Politics PAL* have examined various aspects of the economy, such as 'de-industrialisation' and the debate about whether or not the economy is recovering. This issue explores the dilemma facing Mrs. Thatcher's Government in terms

of economic policy. She wishes to push back the frontiers of the State and give individuals more 'freedom'. This, amongst other things, would involve the Government spending less, collecting less in taxation, with the individual keeping more of his income to spend in ways that he chooses. However, Britain is experiencing a recession and there are 3 million people out of work and who are not paying income tax. Because they are unemployed the Government, which is now getting less money from taxes, has to pay more out in the form of unemployment benefits. Added to this are other factors which have pushed the Government into spending more and more to the point where public expenditure has been surging ahead. This, of course, is very much at odds with Mrs. Thatcher's philosophy. So what is the Government trying to do about it? And why is it causing so much conflict?

(i) Controlling Public Expenditure

Background Information:

Public expenditure, or government spending, is the money spent on providing things such as social security, defence, education, the NHS and all the other services and payments which come from the State. Fig. 1 shows how public money was spent in 1983-84, and Table 10 shows how much the Government intends to spend during 1984-85. Money to pay for all these services comes from a great variety of taxes, incomes, and revenues from the sale of assets. If the Chancellor does not have enough to pay the public spending bill he borrows money, and the amount borrowed is the 'public sector borrowing requirement' (PBSR).

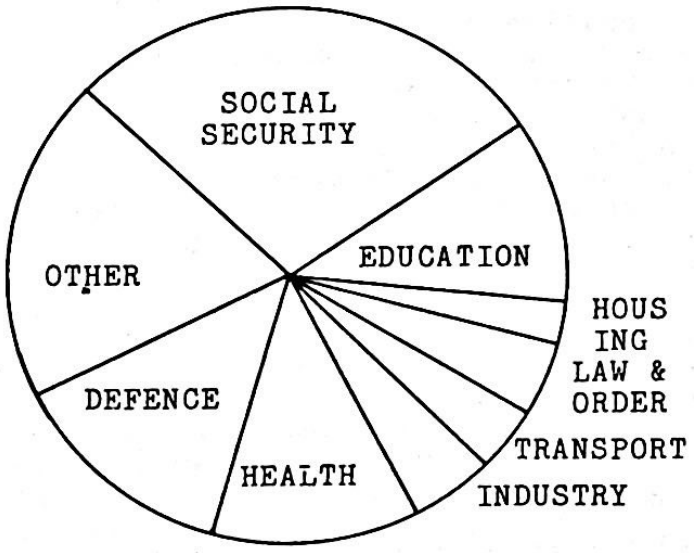


Fig. 1. Public Expenditure 1983-84

	£m
DEFENCE	15,900
HOUSING	6,644
INDUSTRY	1,124
TRANSPORT	3,314
LAW & ORDER	4,014
EDUCATION	12,548
HEALTH	14,634
SOCIAL SECURITY	34,121
OTHER	27,766
TOTAL	120,065

Table 10. What the Government intends to spend in 1984-85

The Conservative view of the public spending shown in Table 10 is that if it gets too great it gobbles up resources which otherwise would be invested in the private sector of the economy. If the Chancellor can reduce public spending, he releases money which will help the private sector to expand and prosper.

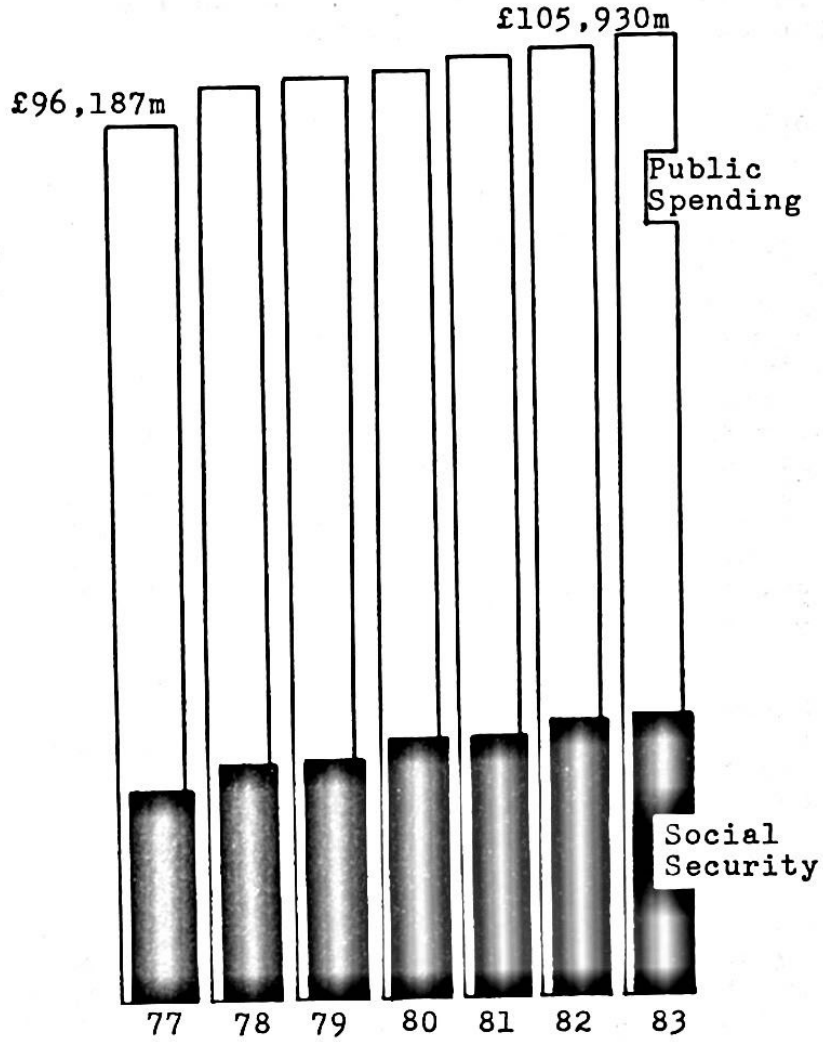
Labour does not accept this view of public spending 'crowding out' private investment. In fact Labour believes that public money spent on new jobs, new buildings, new school books etc., actually helps the private sector to prosper. A new school built with public money will increase the demand for bricks, cement and glass, and so will mean more work and prosperity for the men who produce building materials. Unemployed building workers will leave the dole queues to construct the school. They will now take home more money which they will spend buying more goods which, in turn, will give more people work manufacturing them.

From the Conservative point of view the rise in public spending is getting out of hand. Fig. 2 shows the rise in public spending that has occured during the last seven years. After allowing for the effects of inflation you can see that each year sees an increase on the year before. Much of the increase is caused by the rising bill for social security, which gets bigger as the number of unemployed and old people increases. In order to pay for this increasing expenditure, taxation has also had to rise. The proportion of the nation's wealth which forms tax is shown in Table 11. You can see that there has been a sharp rise between 1979 and 1982.

The fact that the levels of public expenditure and taxation are rising is bad news for a Conservative Chancellor who is committed to reducing both. The 1979 Conservative election manifesto stated that "The State takes too much of the nation's income. Its share must be reduced." The Conservatives promised to cut public expenditure and to reduce both taxation and government borrowing. But the trends which the Conservatives condemned in 1979 continued under Mrs. Thatcher. This frustrated and annoyed even the Government's strongest supporters. *The Sunday Telegraph* attacked the Conservative record on public spending, shown in Fig. 2, complaining that

> "The truth is that public expenditure has risen by 6.2% over the past four years expressed in cost terms: and present plans imply a continuation of this trend. It follows that the State has claimed an increasing slice of the gross domestic product during the period of Tory rule - from 40.5% in 1979-80 to 44.5% in 1981-82."

The Times was equally critical of the ever-rising tax burden shown in Table 11. All of this was made worse by the knowledge that a major source of government income will start declining sharply by the end of the 1980s - oil revenue from the North Sea. This revenue is now near its highest level and provides the



1979	39.6%
1980	41.9%
1981	44.4%
1982	45.7%

Table 11. Taxes as a proportion of the GNP

Fig. 2. Public Spending in Real Terms

Government with an important source of money.

If the Chancellor wants to reduce the level of taxation, the options open to him in theory look simple and straight forward. Firstly, he can let the economy grow so that there will be fewer people out of work. This would result in less money going out as unemployment benefit and more money coming in as income tax. But the economy does not work as simply as this in practice. Studies have shown that if the economy is expanded by a £3,000m government spending boost - and this is the amount that Tory 'wets' have been demanding - unemployment would only *slow down*. It would not be *reversed*. Therefore there would not be any massive savings for the Government in paying out less benefits. To halt the rise in unemployment a boost of £8,000m to the economy would be needed from the Chancellor. But this would also have the unwelcome side-effects of (i) increasing the rate

of inflation and (ii) causing a balance of payments crisis as high consumer spending reduces the amount of goods which are exported and increases the amount which is imported.

The Chancellor's second option is to make major cuts in public spending so that less money needs to be collected through taxation. In other words, if he is able to reduce the amount of money spent by the local authorities, make major savings in the NHS, make cuts in social security and other areas, then he will be able to reduce the level of taxation. But this policy does not work out so easily in practice. Closing hospital wards, sacking doctors and nurses, and closing old people's homes are very unpopular decisions with the electorate. The *1983 Politics PAL* reported the contents of the late 'Think Tank's' secret report which considered dismantling the Welfare State. Mrs. Thatcher quickly disowned the report, no doubt worried about public reaction to it as the general election approached. There are also other unpleasant side-effects which would result from deep cuts into public expenditure. Economic growth would come to a halt and the number of people out of work would rise above the 4 million mark.

The dilemma facing the Chancellor was the subject of a special study by Treasury economists during the year. Their confidential report was presented to the Cabinet, and also leaked to journalists. The Treasury directed attention to the position at the beginning of the next decade in what would be Mrs. Thatcher's third term in office. The report examined two 'scenarios'.

* The first possibility was the optimistic one. It was based on the assumption that there would be steady growth of 2½% a year until 1990. Unemployment would fall to around 2 million. Public spending would fall to take up 39.3% of total national output.

  Not all that is in this forecast will please the Government. Firstly, although the economy is now growing between 2-3% a year this rate is expected to get slower from 1985 onwards. Secondly, even if the 2½% growth rate was kept steady until 1990 public spending would be consuming only 1% less of the national output than in 1979. In other words, the best that the Conservatives can hope for in 1990 is only 1% different from the position in Labour's last year in office.

* The second possibility is the pessimistic one. It was based on the assumption that there will be very little economic growth and that the economy will stagnate until 1990. Under these circumstances public spending would rise to take up 46.8% of the national wealth. This would mean that taxes would have to rise sharply in order to pay for the higher public spending. Income tax would have to rise to a basic rate of 45pence, or VAT would have to rise to 25% on all goods including food, or almost all personal tax allowances would have to be abolished.

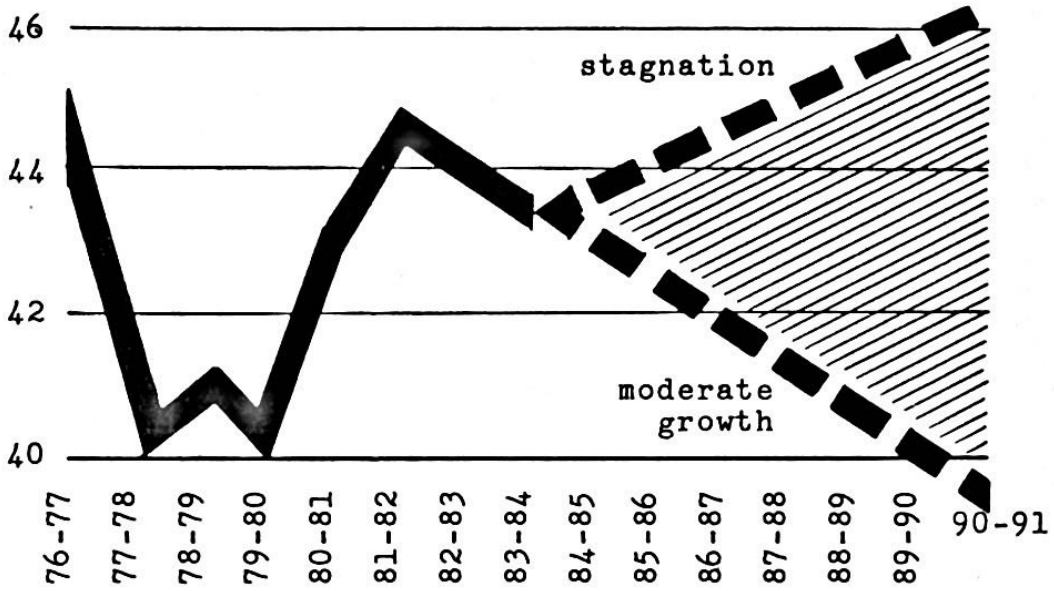


Fig. 3. Public Spending as a Percentage of National Output

Fig. 3 illustrates the difference between the two Treasury forecasts . The shaded area shows how the share of the economy consumed by public spending is affected by different rates of economic growth. However, the Treasury forecast of a public spending crisis in 1990 has been criticised by a number of economists. They accuse the Treasury of (i) overestimating public expenditure bearing in mind that the Welfare State will have to provide for fewer young and old people by 1990 and (ii) underestimating Britain's economic growth rate. For example, the gloomy forecast made by the Treasury has already been overtaken by events.

The Chancellor's War on Public Spending:

The Chancellor, Nigel Lawson, informed the Conservative Party Conference that he was committed to reducing public expenditure and cutting taxes. Realistically he is probably more concerned about stopping public spending from rising than he is about reducing it. One of his first acts as Chancellor was to get an emergency £500m cut in public spending together with an extra £500m from selling off government assets. The 'big spending' government departments suffered most since cuts were made in defence, education and health. These emergency measures were taken only to solve the current crisis, and the Chancellor made it clear that he would soon be demanding bigger cuts to a total

of £2,500m. He warned that taxes would have to rise if public spending continued to surge ahead. This was really a threat to his Cabinet colleagues in the big spending departments letting them know that he expected them to accept big cuts. But as might be expected, there was tremendous conflict within the Cabinet over how these savings would be made. Each Minister was determined to save his own department from big cuts. It was agreed that decisions about the cuts should be referred to a small committee of senior Ministers chaired by Lord Whitelaw. This committee became known as the 'star chamber'.

In the end compromises were reached which pleased some Ministers more than others. Norman Fowler, the Social Services Minister, successfully stopped cuts being made in unemployment benefit and supplementary benefit. But he conceded that housing benefit would be cut. This would result in 500,000 families losing housing benefit altogether, with sharp reductions in benefit for all the families who continued to receive it. Peter Walker, the Energy Secretary, was visiting China and thus absent when important decisions were being made. On his return he was angry to find that gas and electricity prices were to be raised in order to bring in more money for the Government via the nationalised industries. He opposed this since both industries were already making large profits, and further increases in charges would act like a 'hidden tax' on the consumer. However, since the price of gas was relatively cheap he agreed that gas prices could rise. But he stuck out against raising the price of electricity. Peter Walker argued that the extra money that the Chancellor wanted could come from making the electricity industry more efficient and not from putting the prices up. Other members of the Cabinet suspected that he was pulling the wool over their eyes with this proposal. It caused so much tension between him and the Prime Minister that there was newspaper speculation that he was in danger of being sacked.

Although the Prime Minister did not personally back all the other demands made by the Chancellor, he got nearly all of the £2,500m cuts that he was seeking for the coming year. But because he did not win his own way completely on the cuts, the Chancellor announced that he intended to raise more money for the government by additional privatisation.

(ii) More Privatisation

Privatisation is the other side of the coin to public spending cuts. If the Chancellor cannot save as much as he wants through public spending cuts, he can still solve his problems by collecting in more money. But he does not want to collect more money through taxation or government borrowing, because both these measures would *increase* the size of government involvement in the economy. However he is in favour of getting in more money through privatisation because this would *reduce* the scope of

government activity.

What is actually meant by the term 'privatisation'? David Steel and David Heald noted that there were two elements to Conservative policy:

* *Denationalisation*, which involves the selling off of government assets as in the case of British Petroleum, British Aerospace, Cable and Wireless, Amersham International, BNOC, and the National Freight Corporation (which was sold to its employees).

  The Government may or may not sell all its holdings. For example, it sold off all of Amersham International but just over half of British Aerospace. Almost every week sees a new candidate named for potential privatisation. Definite candidates include British Telecom and British Airways. Possible candidates include parts of British Leyland, British Steel and British Rail. Extreme supporters of privatisation would even like to see the motorways sold off.

* *Liberalisation*, which involves relaxing government monopoly and opening up areas to competition. The Post Office Engineering Union opposed private competition from Mercury Communication in providing telephone services. Local government has seen considerable privatisation of its services, not always with a successful record, in areas such as school cleaning, refuse disposal and grass cutting.

Parliament spent a great deal of 1983 discussing privatisation. In some ways it is surprising that the Government is so keen on the policy because there is very little support for it amongst the public. There are many arguments for and against privatisation (see *PAL BRIEF 1*) but the one that concerns us here is the economic one. The sale of public assets raised nearly £1.7 billion by 1983. But by the end of Mrs. Thatcher's second term in office it will have provided over five times as much - a sum in the region of £11 billion. One senior Whitehall civil servant has been quoted as saying "The presumption now is not to justify privatisation, but to justify not privatising."

The Chancellor announced that he intended to raise a further £400m through privatisation because the public spending cuts had not saved as much as he wanted. Steel and Heald have pointed to the weakness of this policy; although privatisation raises money immediately, it loses future profits. For example, the Government sold the Wytch Farm oilfield for a relatively small sum of money and have lost all the future profits which would have been substantial. Privatisation has been described as "selling the silver to pay the servants." Surprisingly the previous Labour Government also sold BP shares because the Treasury wanted immediate money. But nevertheless Labour opposes the scale of privatisation envisaged by the Conservatives.

Suggested Reading:

For a review of economic policy see the series of articles in *The Times* by Frances Williams: 'Economy: the elusive right track' (20.9.83); 'The prosperous road to 4m jobless' (21.9.83); 'Problems despite unlikely U-turn' (22.9.83)

David Steel and David Heald,'Privatising public enterprise: an analysis of the Government's case', *The Political Quarterly*, 53 (1982)

Steve Vines *et al.*,'Thatcher's £11bn sell-off', *The Observer* (2.10.83)

Stephen Aris and David Lipsey,'Is the counter-revolution working?' *The Sunday Times* (9.10.83)

David Blake, 'Phoney figuring', *New Statesman* (11.11.83)

W. A. P. Manser, 'Nationalisation or privatisation: the case for each'. *The Banker* (December 1982)

PAL BRIEF 1: Quangos and the nationalised industries (see end pages for details)

LOCAL GOVERNMENT: THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES

The theme of cuts in public spending links together issues which normally have little in common. For example, developments at both local government level and the supra-national level of the European Community (see next item) are both dominated by the Government's efforts to limit public spending. This year the local authorities have spent £771m above the target set by the Government. Most of this extra spending was done by 16 'high-spending' Labour-controlled local authorities. It must be said that adjectives such as 'high-spending' or 'over-spending' are subjective in the context of the public spending debate. The Government may accuse an authority of 'over spending', but the authority concerned may feel that what it spends is perfectly correct and not excessive.

The annual rate support grant settlement is the total sum provided by central government and is agreed in Cabinet. It is usually a compromise between what the Treasury wants and what the DoE thinks is realistic. Naturally the Treasury wants to give the local authorities as little as possible, a position in line with the Chancellor's policy of limiting public spending. But the DoE does not want too little from central government because this would mean local authorities having to find the money from big rate rises. The Government lets the local authorities know how much money they will be getting some time during the summer so that the authorities can start planning their budget for the year ahead. The Government publishes its final decisions at the

end of the year. As we shall see, this year the Government has set its sights on controlling the high-spending authorities through 'rate capping'.

The Government has been concerned for many years about local authority finance in general and the rates system in particular. There have been many proposals and measures over the years, but the problems identified by the Conservatives have never been solved. The major solutions include:

* Abolishing the rates. Ten years ago when Mrs. Thatcher was shadow Environment minister, she was determined to get rid of the rating system. However, the alternatives to the rates seemed even more unsatisfactory:
  (i) *Poll tax.* This alternative was favoured by the former Environment Secretary, Michael Heseltine, but opposed by others who did not want a tax based on the electoral register.
  (ii) *Local sales tax.* This way of raising local revenue is opposed by many Tories because it does not fit in with the notion of Conservatives being a 'tax cutting' party. The Treasury also dislikes the idea of a local sales tax since it might limit the Chancellor's freedom to raise VAT.
  (iii) *Local income tax.* This alternative is also opposed by many Tories because once again it is contrary to the Conservative 'tax cutting' image. Again the Treasury is opposed to the idea because it would weaken the department's control over income tax in general. The Government has stated that it would introduce LIT only "on the basis of widespread political support" and that such support does not exist. However, all the other political parties support LIT, as do the local authority associations (Association of Metropolitan Authorities, Association of County Councils, and Association of District Councils). No doubt these associations feel that a LIT would increase the strength and accountability of local government. Professors George Jones and John Stewart make the point that there is more public support for LIT than there is for rate capping.

* Targets for local authority spending. These targets angered Labour councils which were expected to cut services as well as Tory councils which had already made economies and were now expected to make more. See *Politics PAL 1982*.

* Local referenda on rate increases. Michael Heseltine included this controversial proposal in a White Paper, but withdrew it in the face of strong opposition. Again, see *Politics PAL 1982*.

* Grant penalties were introduced by the Minister for those councils which over-spent their targets. Such councils have lost some of the money which normally they would have

received from central government, so that they have had to raise the rates to find the money which they had lost. See *Politics PAL 1983*.

* The most recent episode in this saga is Patrick Jenkin's 'rate capping' scheme outlined in his White Paper, *Rates*. Rate capping is basically an attempt to give central government greater control over council spending. Most district councils will be excluded from rate limitations, but 21 will remain possible candidates for rate limitation if they step out of line. Overspenders will be hit by a penalty system which results in a loss of government grant according to how much is overspent. Overspending is calculated by how much an authority spends over and above what the Government thinks it ought to spend (its *grant related expenditure assessment*). Councils which overspend their targets by up to 1% will lose grant equivalent to 2p in the pound on the rates. For the second 1% of overspending they face a further grant loss worth 4p on the rates. For the third 1% the additional grant loss will be worth an 8p rate. For the fourth 1% there will be an extra 9p penalty, and for every subsequent 1% of overspending there will be a further 9p penalty. Authorities will not be able to get the money lost through the penalties back from demanding higher rates, because asking the public to pay 'excess' rates will be illegal.

Opposition to rate capping has come from all the local authority associations, whose members feel that the Government is further undermining local democracy. They feel that centralised government control has increased to the point where local councils are no longer free to provide services which they believe are needed in their areas (this point is discussed later). About sixty Tory MPs also oppose the rate capping proposals; they see them as an ill-thought out extension of State centralisation.

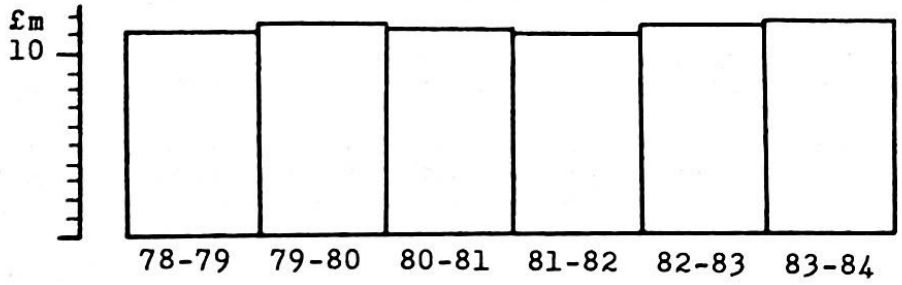


Fig. 4. The Growth of Local Authority Spending in Real Terms

Many in local government feel that they are being made the scapegoat for the Government's own failures to control public spending. Even low-spending councils can spend only 3% more cash in 1984-85 than in 1983-84. After allowing for inflation

this 3% 'rise' means that they will have to make further economies. High-spending authorities will have to spend 6% less in cash in 1984-85. After allowing for inflation this represents a cut of 11 or 12 per cent.

If local authority spending is looked at in terms of the share of the national income it consumes, it has fallen from 10.5% in 1978-79 to 10.2% in 1983-84. Fig. 4 shows how constant local authority spending has been during this period after allowing for the effects of inflation. The share of this spending which comes from central government will be cut by nearly 1% during this coming year. Moreover, this reduction is part of a general trend - at the end of the 1970s central government provided nearly 60% of local government spending, but by 1984 this proportion had dropped to 52%.

Streamlining the Cities:

Also related closely to the control of public spending is the Government's plan to abolish the GLC and the six metropolitan councils (Tyne and Wear, Greater Manchester, West Yorkshire, South Yorkshire, Merseyside and the West Midlands). All are Labour-controlled, and the GLC and South Yorkshire (nicknamed the Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire) have become known for left-wing opposition to the Government. They are due to be abolished on April 1st, 1986, allowing the Government to control 'overspending' by the time of the next general election.

The White Paper, *Streamlining the Cities*, argued that there is no real role for the metropolitan councils. A previous Conservative Government had created them and, with hindsight, it was a wrong decision. It was argued in the White Paper that abolition will save money and increase efficiency. Most of the functions exercised by the 'mets' would become the direct responsibility of the borough or district councils. Such functions will include planning, highways, waste disposal, housing and trading standards. Functions not passed to the boroughs or districts, such as fire, police and public transport, will be run by joint boards. These boards will be composed of members nominated by borough and district councils from amongst their elected members.

Some Tories are dubious about the abolition of the metropolitan councils saving money, and others fear that the reforms will end up actually costing more. Also they fear that the creation of the joint boards will mark a massive expansion of quangos (or perhaps more correctly named 'qualgos') which will be costly to finance. Earlier in the debate the Government claimed that abolishing the mets would save £120m a year and 9000 jobs would be axed. The White Paper failed to repeat these claims. Opponents of the reforms, such as Geoff Pollard, Director of Finance, West Yorkshire Metropolitan County Council, are convinced

that abolition will cost - and not save - money. He has calculated that abolishing the 6 mets alone would cost a once-and-for-all sum of £165m plus an extra £45m a year to provide the same services at present costs. He wondered whether the 9,000 'saved jobs' mentioned by the Government would in fact simply be the result of privatisation rather than reorganisation. An independent study from Coopers and Lybrand commissioned by West Yorkshire suggested that the Government had exaggerated the amount of overspend by the metropolitan authorities. Councillors suspected that the Government had deliberately presented a distorted picture of the mets in order to justify abolishing them.

The Unitary State:

This section concludes by returning to consider the relationship between central and local government. In the debates over abolishing the mets and the rate capping powers, the Environment Secretary repeated the argument that "Britain is a unitary state." And the point that he drew from this observation was that local government must do what central government wishes. The White Paper, *Rates*, argued

> "But we live in a unitary and not a federal state. Although local authorities are responsible to their electorates, they derive their powers from parliament."

In other words, central government gave local government the right to levy rates but just as easily central government can limit or take away that right.

Those who favour local government democracy point out that Britain is almost alone as the only country in western Europe which has not endorsed the Council of Europe's proposed Charter of Local Self-Government. They oppose the strict 'unitary state' argument by claiming that democracy involves as many people as possible in decision-making. Local government is therefore a vital part of the democratic process. In other words, local democracy is essential to national democracy. Many Tories are against the 'new centralism' which now seems a part of Government policy. They oppose the idea that the State should gain more and more power over people's lives. They support local government since it provides the individual with some protection against central government.

Suggested Reading:

Rodney Brooke,'Abolition will increase financial diificulties', *Local Government Chronicle* (28.10.83)

Geoff Pollard,'Count the cost', *Local Government Chronicle* (2.9.83)

John Dyson, 'Stop rate capping', *Local Government Chronicle* (2.9.83)

George Jones and John Stewart, 'Refuting the White Paper', *Local Government Chronicle* (23.9.83)

George Jones and John Stewart, 'Consensus on local income tax', *Local Government Chronicle* (25.11.83)

Adam Raphael, 'Rates may be next Thatcher banana skin', *The Observer* (6.11.83)

David Lipsey, 'Tory backbench revolt over rate-curb powers', *The Sunday Times* (18.12.83)

BRITAIN IN EUROPE: WHITE KNIGHT OR BLACK SHEEP?

Britain has been accused by the President of the European Commission of trying to destroy the very foundations of the Community. What was the cause of this angry statement? The conflict is very complex - on the surface it has been caused because Britain's public spending crisis has got caught up with the Community's own financial crisis.

The Community's financial crisis is not new; for many years there have been arguments about contributions made to the Community budget by member states. Member countries pay into the Community budget, but also receive payments from it. But the inequalities that exist cause friction between the different governments. Those which receive more money than they pay in are naturally happy with the present system, whereas those which pay in far more than they get back are anxious to get the system changed. Some examples will help to illustrate this problem. Britain is one of the biggest net contributors to the budget, paying in £1,122m more than it gets back. Germany pays in £1,710m more than it gets back, whereas Italy gets back £830m more than it pays in. One difference between Britain and Germany is that Germany exports £5,130m more goods to other Community countries than it imports from them. But Britain imports £1,140m more from the Community countries than is exported to them. Thus Germany is a little happier about its large contribution to the Community budget than is Britain.

At the root of the Community's budget crisis lies the Common Agricultural Policy. The EEC was formed originally to foster free enterprise in western Europe, but Article 42 of the Treaty of Rome excluded agriculture from free market competition. The CAP currently costs European tax-payers around £11 billion a year. This represents 62% of the Community's budget, and over half of this money is used to store, destroy or subsidise the dumping of unwanted food in eastern Europe. In other words, roughly a third of all money spent by the Community is used to

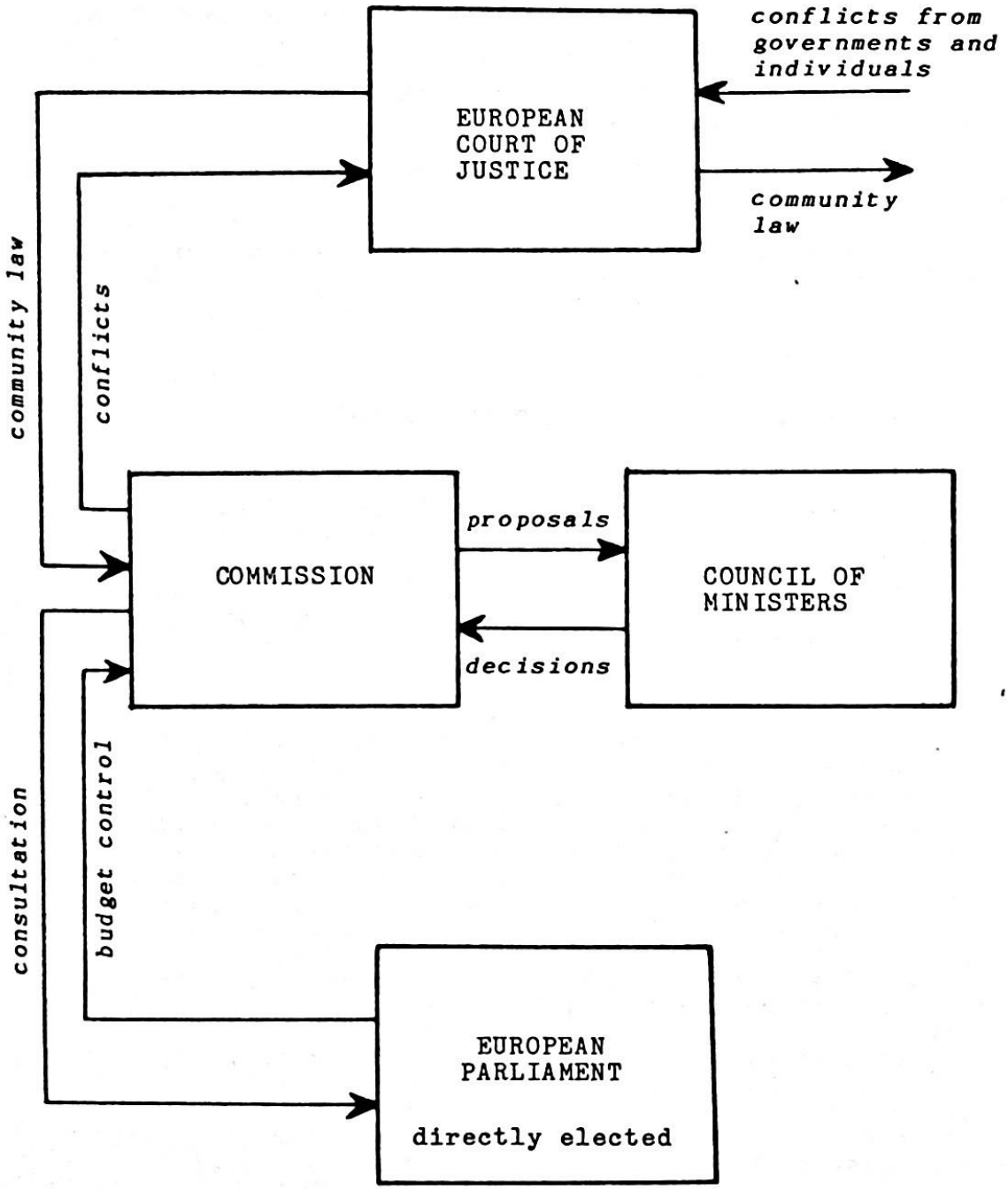


Fig. 5. Basic Structure of the European Community

get rid of food which is expensive to produce and which nobody wants to buy. From Britain's point of view, the CAP no longer fits. The CAP was the result of a compromise drawn up in 1958 between the six original EEC members when the agricultural system in Europe was very different from that of today. But vested interests are making it very difficult to reform the CAP.

Britain has two major complaints about the Community budget:

* that too much of the budget is spent on agriculture. Farm spending must be brought under control and restrained from growing any more.

* there must be a 'safety net' which will limit the size of any one country's contribution to the budget. As the Community gets bigger through new members joining, so the financial burden falling to Britain could increase in size. Therefore reforms are needed including new methods for calculating Britain's contribution.

The complex negotiations surrounding the Community's budget crisis illustrate how some of Europe's institutions work:

* The 'summit', in which heads of government meet three times a year. The summit was devised as a quick method of reaching agreement, but decisions can be made only when all agree. The Athens summit ended without making any progress on the budget crisis. Britain made it clear that it would use its veto and not allow the Community to increase its budget. This would result in the Community literally running out of money sometime in 1984.

* Faced with this crisis, the Commission has made some savings in order to stretch out the Community's cash and push the day when the money runs out as far away as possible. The 14-man Commission is appointed by the governments of the member countries - 2 from France, Italy, Britain and West Germany, and one each from the others. The Commission places proposals before the Council of Ministers, which makes the decisions.

* The Council of Ministers can only make unanimous decisions, and it is because of this that Britain has the Community over a barrel. Britain can veto any decision where its national interests are concerned, and thus it can veto the Community's budget. It is ironic that Britain is now taking advantage of the veto since it was introduced by President de Gaulle to protect French interests in 1966.

* The European Parliament has few powers, with the exception that it is able to block the budget. Britain sends 81 MEPs to the European Parliament which has a total of 434 members. The Parliament has voted to freeze Britain's rebate of £457m in an attempt to put pressure on member governments to reform the Community. Although this action hurts Britain in the short-run, it is actually aimed at bringing about what Britain wants in the long-run. Last year the European Parliament froze repayments to Britain, but the rebate was eventually received. If this proves not to be the case this year, Britain could take its grievance to:

* The European Court of Justice, which interprets the workings of the Treaty of Rome and makes Community Law. Community Law supersedes the national law of member countries.

Edward Heath was very idealistic about the Common Market, and when he was Prime Minister he was prepared for Britain to pay a high price to put these European ideals into practice. To be fair to Mr. Heath, the advantages of joining the European Community appeared to be far greater than they have actually turned out to be. The six original members of the EEC had enjoyed a long period of economic growth, but this prosperity vanished at the very time when Britain joined. Britain's membership has been soured by the energy crisis and a decade of world recession. Today there are few extreme pro-Marketeers inside the Conservative Party. Indeed, a considerable number of MPs have become sceptical about the Community and around forty of them are members of the European Reform Group.

Suggested Reading:

Charles Moore, 'Our own resources', *The Spectator* (19.11.83)

Giles Merritt and Brian Moynahan, 'How to relaunch the Common Market', *The Sunday Times* (11.12.83)

THE CIVIL SERVICE: WHAT NEXT, MINISTER?

The role of the State in society was the subject of this year's Reith lectures given by Sir Douglas Wass, former permanent secretary at the Treasury. He argued that many important economic decisions have been taken by the Prime Minister and Chancellor supported only by one or two senior Treasury civil servants. This effectively gives those top civil servants more influence than most members of the Cabinet. He proposed that government should be made more responsive and accountable, with the Commons playing a bigger role. In particular, he was keen on seeing scrutiny by select committees making the Commons more effective in the process of governing Britain.

Another in a series of speeches on the performance of top civil servants was made in September by Sir John Hoskyns, formerly head of Mrs. Thatcher's policy unit. He continued to attack the traditional Westminster and Whitehall way of doing things, arguing that the government of Britain depends on "a talent pool which could not sustain a single multi-national company." He called for changes:

> "First, the Prime Minister should no longer be restricted to the small pool of career politicians in Westminster in forming a government. Secondly, Whitehall must be organised for strategy and innovation, as well as for day to day political survival. Thirdly, it must be possible to bring adequate numbers of high quality outsiders into the Civil Service. Fourthly, the workload on ministers must be reduced."

Sir John argued that businessmen should become more involved in government since "the way businessmen think and act is more relevant than that of most of the politicians, civil servants, academics and commentators who have concerned themselves with the nation's problems thus far." Sir Douglas Wass disagreed with this view: "Businessmen fall into the same trap, concentrating on day to day tasks. Businessmen are very good pragmatists; but basically they are no better, and normally not as good, at thinking as the best of our civil servants." Lord Bancroft, former head of the Home Civil Service, argued a different case. He believed that the relative scarcity of businessmen in Whitehall was not because civil servants were reluctant to allow them in, but because it was difficult to persuade businessmen to enter and serve the public.

During his time in the Number Ten Policy Unit, Sir John Hoskyns attacked top civil servants as vigorously as any left-wing critics. His controversial style led to bad relations between the Policy Unit and the rest of Whitehall. He left in May, 1982. The idea of introducing politically-committed outsiders and businessmen into government - as in the USA - aroused fierce opposition from some senior civil servants.

Greater impact on civil service practices was made by Sir Derek Rayner, from Marks and Spencer. He headed a small unit within the Cabinet Office to eliminate waste in Whitehall. By the time Sir Derek returned to Marks and Spencer in December 1982 considerable savings had been made and other areas in which future savings might be made had been identified. Unlike Sir John Hoskyns, Sir Derek Rayner did not attack the civil service head-on but worked to get a gradual change in attitudes.

Suggested Reading:

John Hoskyns, 'How to galvanise the moribund establishment which rules Britain', *The Guardian* (30.9.83)

Lord Bancroft, 'In defence of the mandarins', *The Observer* (2.10.83)

Peter Hennessy, 'Hoskyns quest gathers strength', *The Times* (18.10.83)

J. A. Greenaway, 'Bureaucrats under pressure: the Thatcher government and the mandarin elite' in L. Robins (Ed.): *Updating British Politics* (London: The Politics Association, 1984)

LESS GOVERNMENT: THE STATE OF THINGS TO COME

Mrs. Thatcher wants to see government play a smaller role in society. On coming to office, she directed Sir Leo Pliatzky to investigate the world of quasi-government with particular reference to 'quangos'. Some quangos were eventually abolished but many of these were relatively unimportant such as the Committee to Examine Standards of Lawn Tennis in Great Britain and the Hadrian's Wall Advisory Committee. In 1983 eighty-two quangos were axed, a cut of about 5%. But there is a tendency for new quangos to be created as old ones disappear. For example, within a short period of the Pliatzky cuts which removed 30 quangos another 30 were created.

Since 1979 150,000 employees have moved from the public sector to the private sector because of privatisation. The number will increase rapidly during the course of this Government's term of office. The size of the civil service is now smaller than at any time since 1945. In 1979 there were 732,000 civil servants and in 1984 the number had fallen to 630,000. Critics of Conservative policy have pointed to the problems being experienced by the Inland Revenue. Here 12,000 staff have been lost and there is now a backlog of 5 million letters awaiting a reply. Fewer staff means a less efficient service in which tax evasion is now very much easier.

Other bodies have been abolished or are in some danger of being abolished. After her victory in the 1983 General Election, Mrs. Thatcher abolished the 'Think Tank' (Central Policy Review Staff). This body was set up by Edward Heath to consider the long term problems which civil servants tended to ignore because they were preoccupied with short-term problems. In 1982 a Think Tank report which considered dismantling the Welfare State was leaked to journalists. This embarrassed the Government and paved the way to its disappearance.

There has been speculation about the future of 'Neddy', the National Economic Development Council. This body was established 22 years ago under the Conservative Government led by Harold Macmillan. It was set up because British industry was not performing as successfully as it ought to have been, and Neddy provided an opportunity for industrialists, trade unionists and the government to discuss important issues. It is thought that Edward Heath came close to axing Neddy in 1970. It is certain that Neddy had to justify its existence to Mrs. Thatcher's Government in 1979, and it came under pressure to reduce the size of its operation. A gloomy Neddy report was made public during the 1983 election campaign which embarrassed the Tory Party. There is a body of businessmen who wish to see the end of Neddy, but it seems likely that Neddy will survive despite the fact that its messages are not always popular with the monetarist right-wing of the Conservative Party.

TRADE UNIONS: HARD TIMES

During the 1970s it seemed that union power had grown to the point that union leaders were amongst the most influential in the country. Governments led by Wilson, Heath and Callaghan all lost support to some extent because they could not cope with the unions. But in 1983 the *Daily Mirror* described the unions "Like the columns of a defeated army struggling to a prisoner of war camp ... Not long ago their battalions looked to be invincible.." How did the unions fall from power?

Firstly, the unions believed that the postwar consensus in which governments were committed to full employment was permanent. But from the outset Mrs. Thatcher ignored the unions, mainly because her monetarist policies had no role for unions to play. The unemployment which resulted from monetarist economic policy on top of a world recession has led to unions losing 2 million members in the first four years of Mrs. Thatcher's Government. Secondly, changes in the rules which give seats on the General Council of the TUC have changed the political balance, with fewer leaders from old left-wing industrial unions and more from right-wing white-collar unions.

The re-election of Mrs. Thatcher was a blow to both left and right, but their responses were different. The left wanted the unions to oppose Tory policy at every opportunity and to boycott talks with the Government on trade union reform. The right argued for more 'realism' which involved the unions coming to terms with the reality of another Conservative government.

The right is winning the day at the TUC; for example, Congress agreed to end the boycott of Norman Tebbit. When leaders met Mr. Tebbit they made it clear that they thought his trade union reforms were "glib and misconceived". They argued that his proposals for the election of union officials and strike ballots threatened the right of union members to determine their own rules and regulations. The TUC claimed that free trade unions are a cornerstone of democracy, and that unions already consulted workers far more than employers do. When Tom King replaced Norman Tebbit as Employment Secretary some felt that he would take a softer line towards the unions. However, as yet there is no evidence of this.

Suggested Reading:

Nicholas Jones, 'Can the unions survive mass unemployment, industrial change and Mr Tebbit?', *The Listener* (30.6.83)

John Lloyd, 'Marching to pragmatism', *New Statesman* (16.9.83)

Donald Macintyre, 'TUC: facing life in the wilderness', *The Sunday Times* (4.9.83)

NUCLEAR ARMS: THINKING ABOUT THE UNTHINKABLE

News about CND rallies or protests by the women of Greenham Common have frequently made the headlines in the last year. Why are people more worried about nuclear weapons now than they were during most of the 1960s and 1970s? This final section of Part One of *PAL* examines the background to the debates on Cruise, Trident, MX, multilateralism and unilateralism.

The first issue which concerns many people is that relations between the US and the USSR have got much worse after many years of detente during which the superpowers got on reasonably well together despite their differences. Recent events such as the shooting down of the KAL 007 airliner by the Soviets or the US invasion of Grenada mean that improvements in superpower relations are unlikely.

Secondly, the nuclear arms race seems to have got out of control. Talks aimed at controlling nuclear arms, the Intermediate Nuclear Force (INF) Talks and the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START), have made no real progress. In fact all the movement is in the direction of increasing arms. The Soviets have gone in for mass deployment of the SS20 and developed the sophisticated Backfire Bomber. The Americans have introduced Cruise missiles which can fly on complex routes at a height of only 200 feet and hit their targets with incredible accuracy. Pershing 11 missiles travel at 14,000 mph and can reach the Soviet Union within a few minutes of being launched. On top of this there is development of the neutron bomb, and in March 1983 President Reagan urged scientists to take huge steps into the future and develop space-based laser defences in what has now become known as his 'Star Wars' speech.

Finally, there have been big changes in strategic doctrine. At one time it was thought that starting a nuclear war would be akin to committing murder and suicide at the same time. In other words, the enemy might be destroyed by your nuclear weapons but would still be able to strike back and destroy you with his. This situation was known as 'Mutual assured destruction' and made a nuclear war seem a very remote possibility. Each side was deterred from attacking the other, and nuclear weapons were known as 'the deterrent'. But now both American and Soviet military leaders think that they could fight and win a nuclear war. Nuclear weapons are held both to deter and to be used. The fact that both superpowers have adopted a 'war fighting strategy' makes a nuclear war seem far more likely than used to be the case. These serious developments should convince you - if you still need convincing - that the subject you are studying is a very important one. Thinking about internaticnal politics and nuclear weapons will depress many individuals, so it is important to remember that politics is an activity which also brings out the very best in people.

PART TWO

STUDYING POLITICS

The aim of this booklet is to help you maximise your knowledge and understanding of politics and government, and to help you increase your skills of expression and argument. The way in which you approach the preparation for your 'A' or 'O' level is important. Although there is no single 'best way' to study, you may not be studying in the ways that suit you most. The following suggestions are made for you to consider: you may wish to reject many of them, but they are listed for you to bear in mind as you develop your own style. Recognise your own personality and temperament in planning the way you work. This might result in your work patterns being different from those of your friends.

STUDY TECHNIQUES:

Never waste time. Organise your study time as efficiently as you are able. This requires an element of planning since there is nothing less effective than haphazard study. Do not try to work solidly for long periods, since few people have a concentration span of more than an hour. If you wish to work for a lengthy period such as three hours, plan to give yourself one or two breaks in which to relax and refresh.

Is the environment in which you study the most conducive to best results? What you see as the 'perfect' environment may not be possible for you to organise - but do your best to maximise efficiency. Which study tasks can you do best in a room with a TV on? Which tasks can you do best in the library? Which tasks can you do best in a deckchair?

Which is the best way to organise your notes: around topics or themes? The notes you take in class will probably provide you with a basic structure - supplement them with appropriate notes from text books, newspapers and journals. Current affairs programmes on TV will provide you with useful material which can be integrated into your notes. Do not underestimate the radio, particularly the *Analysis* programmes and programmes on Saturday morning which are excellent sources of information and ideas.

Invest in a lever-arch file, ring folder or other loose-leaf folder - you need a flexible system for adding or reclassifying material.

It is rarely necessary to read a book thoroughly in order to extract the central ideas. Practice will teach you how to 'gut' or 'scan' a book in order to do this. Accurately record the author, title and date of publication. Often as little as one page of notes will record the author's central idea or argument; there is no need to copy out large chunks of the text. If an idea in one book is disputed in another, make a note of this since it is important to gather different interpretations of the same phenomenon. Basic text books often duplicate similar material; obviously there is no need to repeat material in your notes. Learn to look for useful signposts in books such as visual headings, italics, or different type-faces which are used to pick out the important sections on a page.

Do try to make your file attractive, since a scruffy file may be 'harder' to pick up for revision than a smart, well organised one. The structure should be logical and the format should be attractive. Use capitals for major headings, and underline sub-headings. Quantitative data should be clear and unambiguous.

Recognise the value of your file and always keep it in safe keeping. Losing or misplacing your file would place you at a great disadvantage.

Limited vocabularly will limit your understanding. Make a habit of looking up words that you do not understand.

ESSAY WRITING:

Essays are probably the main means by which your ability and progress on a course is judged by the teacher or lecturer. This is particularly true for those students who continue into higher education, where 'continuous assessment' is a common practice. Frequently students 'do poorly' on a course not because they are intellectually weak but because they have not mastered the skills of successful essay writing. Improvement in essay writing skills comes through practice and through what vou 'absorb' through reading.

Remember that essays should take the form of a reasoned argument: the writer should attempt to *persuade the reader* of the justifiability of the line of argument adopted. The *clarity of the argument* is important. A clear argument is not only easier to understand, it also demonstrates a clear understanding on the part of the writer. A clear argument requires an initial statement of the stance that is to be adopted. In practice, this may involve some comment on how the question is to be interpreted, how some concept is to be defined, what kind of information is pertinent, and why it is pertinent. An introductory statement of this kind provides for a clearer answer than one that immediately launches into the subject matter.

A clear argument will normally involve some *development in the reasoning*, the clarity and significance of one point relying on the existence of a previous point. An essay therefore requires planning. Where there is no clear theme to a work, or where the theme is disjointed, the reader may find the work confusing. Avoid straying from the theme or including irrelevant material. Make sure the material is relevant to the question and that its relevance is explained.

Remember that 'facts' cannot be assumed to speak for themselves. An essay cannot depend for its success on stating 'facts', but must rely on arguing the case. Statistical data should be interpreted and integrated into the argument.

In academic writing the persuasiveness of an argument will largely depend on the extent to which the arguments presented can be supported with *reference to established texts or studies* within the field. References to a study or text should include the name(s) of the author(s) and the date of publication of the book or article in question.
e.g. Hinkley (1981) notes that ....

Examples and quotations drawn from specified studies add weight to an argument and should be used to illustrate essays. Where quotations of more than a few words are used they should be inset from the margin. Quotations should always be followed by the name of the author, the date of publication and the page number.
e.g. Hinkley (1981) argues that coalition activity can be viewed as a "small measure" of political activity since coalition activities include

> "a collective activity; a combination of conflict and coordination; and an exercise of power. These three in combination seem particularly essential to political action, the collective mixed-motive situation being precisely the kind of human problem that requires political skills."
>
> (Hinkley 1981 p. 145)

Always list the references at the end of essays, to include those works that have been used and/or cited in the course of the essay. In this way the reader can check the full references for ideas and quotations only denoted by name and date in the text and can, at a glance, see the kind of orientation the essay has adopted. For essays the form of reference which is adequate for a bibliography would include the full name of the author, the date of publication and title of the work (underlined).
e.g. Barbara Hinkley (1981) <u>Coalitions and Politics</u>

Never plagiarise. The reader will soon realise that you have copied large chunks straight from a book and penalise you accordingly.

Be grammatical and avoid slang phrases or cliches. If your handwriting is poor, do make every effort to improve it. The reader probably has a pile of essays to mark and will soon lose patience with your effort if he has to struggle through every sentence. A neat essay gives an immediately favourable impression to the reader.

Read your essay through before handing it in. Ask yourself:

Accuracy: are the ideas and data used in the essay a faithful reflection of the sources?

Clarity: are the ideas and data presented in a fashion designed to enhance their persuasiveness to the reader? Is there a logical progression to the argument? Is it well expressed?

Sources: are the ideas and data attributed (in an appropriate way) to the author/studies? Have enough sources been consulted? Has the work been plagiarised?

Analysis and Description: are ideas from authors just described or are they considered within a broader framework and related to other relevant issues? Does the essay exhibit originality in its comparison of ideas and data?

EXAMINATION TECHNIQUES:

The answers you write under examination conditions should be thought of generally as essays which should meet most of the criteria outlined above. The importance of constructing answers to examination questions was indicated in a recent GCE Examiner's Report.

> "Serious concern is felt at what many judge to be steadily declining evidence of the ability to structure an argument. Frequently the sequence of points reveals no underlying logic; points are listed with no attempt to connect them or even to order them in terms of some scale of priority, even implicitly. Thus, by contrast, the balanced, structured, interrelated answer tends to gain credit *even when its content is comparatively thin.*"
>
> (JMB 1980: my italics)

In order to display your knowledge and understanding to best effect, therefore, you will need to think carefully about the way in which you will tackle the examination. A sound examination technique can gain you additional marks regardless of how much you know and understand your subject.

Read the rubric carefully and read all the questions from which you have a choice. Decide on your choice fairly quickly.

Plan the answer to each question in pencil using this as an opportunity to structure your answer. Do take care in reading the terms of each question: for example, if a question asks

you to compare, you must present two or more cases showing similarities and differences; if the question asks you to evaluate, you must give a reasoned judgment and provide authoritative reasons. Take a cue for the structure and development of your answer from the question itself. Underline the key words in the question. Some students may prefer to plan all the answers before they attempt to write any answers.

Start each answer on a fresh page. Do not copy out the question from the examination paper unless you derive some benefit from doing so.

Examinations are 'time constrained' and this often poses students with problems about allocating time. Remember that unless stated otherwise, all questions carry equal marks. The time you devote to each question should be proportionate to the marks that each question is worth. Do not fall into the trap of *spending too much time answering one question* because it is on a topic which you concentrated on in your revision. The extra marks that you might expect to gain would probably be more than wiped out by the marks you would lose through skimping other answers.

Should you miscalculate your timing and find that you have only minutes in which to answer the final question, then provide a skeleton answer in note form. If the examiner can follow the arguments and points that you would have developed, he is likely to give you some credit for the attempt.

In allocating time, try to reserve a few minutes at the end to read through your script keeping an eye open in particular for omitted words and spelling mistakes. If you are unsure about spelling a particular word, check the question to see if it appears there.

Remember that 'O' and 'A' level examiners are under pressure to mark a large number of scripts in a relatively short period of time. You can create an initial favourable impression by presenting a legible script.

INTERPRETING EXAM QUESTIONS:

GCE examiners frequently complain that candidates do not do as they are asked in each question. For example candidates might be asked to "evaluate the work of select committees", but some will simply write down all they know about select committees without attempting any evaluation. *Politics PAL* concludes with a brief outline of some of the key terms used in GCE examination papers:

DESCRIBE	Recall facts, events, processes etc., in an accurate and detailed way. Give an account of what something looked like, or what happened.
EVALUATE	Give a judgement or opinion as to the worth of something. Judgements should be reasoned, and whenever possible be supported by arguments or facts from books, articles or newspapers.
COMPARE	To point out similarities or likenesses between things. In practice, this may also involve pointing out the contrasts or differences between things.
DISCUSS	To present or explain clearly several sides of a point, or to examine a topic in detail.
ANALYSE	To break down complex issues, ideas and processes into component parts and to recognise how the various parts are related.
ARGUE	The use of evidence and concepts to make a case and to draw conclusions. Arguments must be defended with facts.
EXPLAIN	To make something clear or to state the reasons for something.
ILLUSTRATE	Provide examples to explain a statement.
INTERPRET	To explain the meaning of facts.
DIFFERENTIATE/ DISTINGUISH	To discuss points which enable you to tell things apart. Generally questions which ask candidates to differentiate between things mention things which are similar in some ways, such as standing committees and select committees.

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